

nexus

Multi Academy Trust

Learning together to be the best we can be



Annual Report

Academic Year 2020-2021

Caring
Nurturing
Child-Centred Family-Focused
Encouraging Enriching
Empowering Passionate
Inclusive



LEARNING TOGETHER, TO BE THE BEST WE CAN BE

Our Mission Statement

- Our learners and their families are at the centre of what we do;
- Our employees and partners are passionate about being the best that they can be;
- Our Trust is relentlessly focused on improvement.

Accounting Officer Introduction

Whilst many could have used the term “living through a pandemic” to define the last 12 months, I remain privileged to report that the children and families we serve through our academies have had another hugely successful year thanks to the incredibly hard work and dedication of our workforce, which goes well beyond our response to COVID-19. Still, that’s a natural place to start...

As statutory attendance requirements were reintroduced by the Government in September 2020, Headteachers worked hard over the summer to ensure all pupils and staff returned to ‘COVID secure’ school sites, which have been subject to constant risk management review and adaption all year.

It is a sad reality that pupils everywhere lost more learning days this year through self isolation and bubble closures than anyone would have wished for, but we have always maintained an offer for children where they are able to attend, and the second national lockdown of state education - between January and March 2021 - saw significantly more pupils continue to attend our academies when compared to the same situation through March, April and May 2020.

The Trust has made huge leaps forward in this business year, with just some of our achievements being: we have developed a mental health framework; outlined our plans to move to being a carbon zero company; established network and mandate groups across our academies to enhance collaboration and peer support as one part of our wider improvement activity; continued to expand the number of pupils in our special academies; and we have maintained absolute fidelity to our commitment to ethical leadership.

This year also saw the Trust go above national pay agreements, when we awarded our non-teaching staff a discretionary 2% pay uplift. We did this because, in September 2020, all teachers were awarded an inflationary pay rise as agreed with the Government. By November 2020, the Chancellor had called for a public sector pay freeze. The Trust felt it was fundamentally unfair to reward some staff with a pay increase and not others. All of our staff have worked so hard through the past 18 months to sustain the public service we deliver, which is so important to our children and families. I am proud that we have put our appreciation into the pay of **all** of our workforce.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Warren Carratt".

Warren Carratt
Chief Executive Officer (Accounting Officer)

OUR ACADEMIES...



The quality of provision at **Abbey** has continued to see the school face high demand for pupil places, with further expansion of the school roll being planned for this year to help meet Barnsley Council's sufficiency needs in 2021 onwards. The school collected yet more awards for its inclusive practice this year, and access to the site has improved with the completion (finally!) of the new road system .

Opening in temporary accommodation in September 2020, the **Bader** community finally decanted to the new school site in January 2021. Opening any new school during the pandemic made some aspects more challenging than others - especially coordinating transitions for new starters. However, Bader has continued to grow and develop in its first year of opening, with more growth planned for September 2021.



Becton has undergone the biggest changes of all our academies in this year, moving into a new site near the Hillsborough Barracks—Chapel House—for our children accessing the school's dual roll offer. Given the diverse range of provision offered through Becton, the school leadership team has been restructured this year with the appointment of an Executive Headteacher and two Heads of School - one overseeing the hospital/medical service and the other overseeing provision at the two Kenwood sites.

Coppice has also experienced change through this year, with the retirement at Easter of the Headteacher and the appointment of an interim Head of School, under the continued leadership of the Executive Head. The Coppice community experienced an unexpected tragedy this year when one of our pupils, Christopher Faulkner, sadly passed away on the school site. In the face of such tragedy, the school community pulled together to support one another and we were able to celebrate Christopher's life and the joy he brought to ours.



Despite welcoming all pupils back in September and not having to manage a first bubble closure until the spring, **Craggs** faced the highest % of home schooling of all our academes, with many families opting to keep their children at home in Jan-March, which has created a big challenge for catch-up this year and into next, like most mainstream primaries nationally . Despite this, Craggs has continued to embed its curriculum developments and a Trust commissioned external review of the school in the summer of 2021 commented positively on the self awareness leaders have of the quality of education and the progression of the new curriculum.

OUR ACADEMIES...



Heatherwood started the school year with a new Head of School who has integrated well into school life and added new skills and experience to the senior leadership team. Due to the complex medical needs of many of the children and young people attending Heatherwood, there have been a number of pupils who have returned to school gradually over the course of the year, with all pupils engaging in the school's online learning offer.

Hilltop school has continued to grow in response to demand for places from local authorities, opening a new classroom in September 2020 funded by Sheffield Council to help meet their sufficiency needs. The school strengthened senior leadership from September with the appointment of a new Deputy Head. The school has continued to be a hub for holiday provision for SEND pupils in Rotherham, with the site in use 50 weeks a year.



Kelford started this year with a new Headteacher, and faced further change in the autumn when the Deputy Head was released on secondment to support another Nexus academy. The new leadership team has continued to grow the school to meet the sufficiency needs of local authorities and the sixth form offer at The View has continued to develop and expand to meet growing demand for places.

North Ridge Community School also started the year with a new Head of School who has integrated well into school life and added new skills and experience to the senior leadership team. North Ridge has continued to embed improvements as it maintains its traction as a 'rapidly improving' school, and has moved to become a 'capacity giver' by supporting Heatherwood with pastoral expertise and Bader by releasing staff to augment their newly recruited workforce.



Pennine View continues to prioritise improvements in its English curriculum, in response to the recommendations from the Ofsted inspection of March 2020. Having appointed an experienced senior leader to re-develop the school's English curriculum in September 2020, leadership has been further strengthened for September 2021 with the creation of - and appointment to - an additional Deputy Head post.

1. INCREASING QUALITY OF PROVISION IN OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Trust started the academic year by refreshing our 5 year strategic plan, rationalising the number of strategic objectives from seven to three.

In working hard to meet strategic objective 1, the Trust has deliberately pursued the creation and maintenance of consistent and stable leadership in our academies to act as the primary enabler of rapid and sustainable improvement. Where necessary, senior leaders have been asked to undertake secondments or short term assignments to support other schools, ensuring all academies in the Trust have the leadership capacity to perpetually move forward.



The addition of two new Assistant CEO posts to the central Trust this year has enabled the MAT to have the strategic capacity to not only keep up with the ever-changing requirements of the Government's COVID-19 guidance for schools, but also drive forward new initiatives and ways of working to help make us the best we can be. The Trust has refreshed its Collaborative School Improvement Framework, with coordinated activity bringing staff together in a wide range of network and mandate groups. The Trust has taken the School Parliament model, piloted at Kelford School, and is developing this into a Trust Parliament model - the first of its kind in the country - in 2021-22.

The (new) annual allocation of £450,000 of capital funding will be utilised in line with our new Asset Strategy, and we have also reviewed our ICT infrastructure with a bolder vision for how the Trust can lead the use of digital technologies in future.

In April 2018 the Trust was appointed as sponsor to open two new special academies (free schools) in the Doncaster Metropolitan Borough and Sheffield City areas. The first of these new academies, Bader Academy (Doncaster) opened on 1 September 2020. The Trust has invested significant time and effort supporting the new school through its first year of opening. Leaders from across the Trust contributed by supporting Bader through its first year of opening, either through the freeing-up of staff to work at the school or by joining school leaders for lesson observations as part of their first cycle of quality assurance. A visit in the summer term from the Department for Education commissioned External Expert reported positively on the progress the school is making. Throughout 2020-21 the Trust also continued to work on the pre-opening of Discovery Academy (Sheffield), which is due to open September 2022.

We have continued to invest in our workforce, funding the roll out of the Flu vaccine in autumn 2020 and providing a flexible and compassionate approach to absence management due to COVID-19. Retention rates remain very high across all our academies.

2. DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS TO BETTER MEET NEED

The Trust has worked closely through 2020-21 with our Doncaster academies to develop The Bridge, a new co-located learning space for our academies' sixth forms where pupils will access a more progressive and age-appropriate learning environment whilst remaining on their school roll, taught and supported by staff who know them well. Doncaster Council's Careers' team has played a key role in partnering with the Trust to make connections into local business, to make The Bridge a true multi-agency project.

The Trust has continued to work closely with local authority commissioners and we have developed innovative plans with Barnsley and Sheffield Councils to help meet their sufficiency needs for this year and future years. We spent much of 2020-21 developing options to open an independent special school, and these plans will be carried into 2021-22, as we consider this to be a key solution to the growing sufficiency needs of the South Yorkshire boroughs.

We have used our strong working relationship with the sector body - The Confederation of School Trusts (CST) - to establish clearer partnerships with senior colleagues at the Department for Education (DfE) and the Education and Skills Funding Agency. This has allowed us to influence thinking on education policy, especially for children with special educational needs and disabilities. We have played a key role in helping redraft the High Needs Operational Guidance, to redress an imbalance between schools and local authorities that will provide a more secure platform for all schools to deliver the best outcomes for pupils. We will continue with this work into 2021-22, as the Trust has been invited into further working groups.

The DfE restructured the landscape of school-led improvement in 2020-21 with the introduction of Teaching School Hubs, and the Trust is a named strategic partner on the board of the Hub for Barnsley & Doncaster. This provides a great opportunity for us to both inform and benefit from the workforce development opportunities that the new Teaching School Hubs will create.

The Trust's school improvement programme has also cultivated new partnerships outside the South Yorkshire region, with connections made to MATs in West Yorkshire and the East of England. We have also worked with specialist providers in the North East to share our learning and expertise, which is a partnership that will grow further in 2021-22.

Our academies continue to foster their own partnerships on a school-by-school basis, which in turn provides invaluable advocacy for the Trust. Our Heads and our workforce are our strongest ambassadors, and the opportunities we have generated this year - and those we continue to create next year - are a direct result of the symbiosis between the Trust and our academies.



3. MAINTAINING A FINANCIALLY VIABLE, SUSTAINABLE AND ETHICALLY DRIVEN MULTI ACADEMY TRUST

The financial environment we operate in continues to be hostile, and with 9 special academies our Trust is disproportionately impacted by the pressure on local authority High Needs Blocks, all of which are overspent by millions in the local area. The delay in introducing the mainstream National Funding Formula has also left the Trust waiting for funding increases that were promised by the Government before now.

Our financial viability therefore depends on prudent expenditure and robust, evidence based negotiations with local authority commissioners for the pupils they place in schools.

As a consequence of sound financial oversight, scrutiny and challenge: all of our academies ended 2020-21 with in-year budget surpluses, and we have set balanced budgets for 2021-22.

**Consolidated Income in
2020/21
£28,388,050**

Headteachers play a pivotal role in ensuring financial efficiency is achieved in our academies, and the central Trust finance & compliance officers work closely with them to ensure decision making is informed by current, accurate financial forecasting.

In 2020-21 the Trust Board re-commissioned both internal and external audit, splitting the contract out for the first time. The final internal audit report of 2020-21 came with only two low level recommendations, an improved and very positive reflection of the financial management practices across the Trust.

Directors also tendered for the Competent Person service in the summer of 2021, ensuring that the new 3 year contract has been tested to provide best value.

The Trust led a procurement process for school catering in the spring of 2021, with 9 of the 10 academies moving to a new, shared contract with a new provider.

Recruitment of new senior leaders in our academies in 2020-21 allowed the Trust to hear about what external parties see and think of Nexus MAT, with many applicants stating of their own volition that they had applied for the role because of the strong reputation the Trust has for being a good employer.

This informal feedback was reflected through formal recognition of the Trust's ethical way of working, as we were named the Apprentices Employer of the Year by the RNN Group in the autumn and went on to win a number of categories at the annual Doncaster Career Hubs Awards. The Trust has also been named as a finalist in the National Governance Association's Outstanding Governance Awards, the second time we have reached the finals in the past 4 years.

As part of our commitment to sustainability we developed our journey to net zero carbon emissions. The plan outlines our ambition to reach net zero by 2030. The work is already resulting in projects to decarbonise our buildings through projects such as LED lighting systems, moving to a renewable energy provider across the Trust, and encouraging employees to access the cycle to work scheme, as well as engaging our young people through the curriculum we teach in our academies.

THE TRUST AS A RESPONSIBLE CIVIC STRUCTURE

In January 2020, the Confederation of School Trusts (CST) published a framework document that outlined their belief that *“school trusts are well set up to play this role [to be civic partners and further support places where they are based to solve some of their most pressing and major problems] - particularly the larger trusts who may be quite large employers in an area and will have the capability and capacity to act with other civic partners. But even smaller trusts can all play a role - as many already do - as good civic partners to their local authority to advance education as a public good in their community”*.

We couldn't agree more!

Nexus MAT was established in 2016 to be an active civic structure, working in partnership with local authorities, communities and other providers to make lives better. At the time Nexus MAT was created, the language of “civic structure” wasn't used to describe our intent. However, CST's published framework and narrative has huge resonance with our values, aspirations and many of our achievements.

The language of our strategic objectives is focused on “our education system”: which means the state education system we are a part of. It is not about academies solely within Nexus MAT. Equally, strategic objective 2 is all about our investment in partnerships to make lives better. Our whole philosophy as a MAT is rooted in our being a responsible civic partner in both the localities we serve and the wider public service we are a part of. Our model of local governance ensures each and every academy remains accountable to the communities we serve.

Our wider work in this area covers multiple elements that serve to strengthen the Trust and our bonds to the other civic structures we share an orbit with:

1. Joint projects and ventures in strategic partnership with our fellow anchor organisations – opening new schools commissioned by local authorities, working closely and proactively with local authorities and NHS commissioners to support specialist sufficiency and services, and developing relationships with local and regional public bodies.
2. Both formal and informal engagement and partnerships with public administrations, through means such as membership of: three Schools Forums, other local panel-based arrangements, and the establishment of a Joint Consultative Negotiating Committee to engage with our valued trades union partners.
3. Active, voluntary participation in civic work, facilitated across all aspects of our workforce - in 2020 we became only the second MAT nationally to be a named partner with Inspiring Governance, making a commitment to promote school governance (outside of our MAT) across our workforce. Our executive leaders are trustees of various local charities and public governance bodies, including one of the local parent carer forums, the local magistracy, and involvement with the South Yorkshire Police & Crime Panel.

Our good work has led to a number of national awards and accreditations, such as the Disability Confident standard, NGA governance awards, and working towards being an accredited Actual Living Wage Employer.

LOOKING TO THE NEXT ANNUAL REPORT...

The future of Government spending is shrouded in uncertainty as a consequence of the financial impact of COVID-19, which creates insecurities for all of those leading and managing public services. Maintaining a strategic perspective of what this may mean for education policy will be key to the Trust being able to best position itself so that our values and ethos are sustained in the medium term.

All academy Trusts are expected to have a growth plan, whilst the potential for growth reduces every year as more schools establish new Trusts and/or join existing ones. The Department for Education has published guidance on Trust mergers, and this appears to be the next phase of MAT evolution. This is not an unexpected development, and the Trust Board has been considering what this could and should mean for our Trust for the past 2 years. There is a real openness that this could lead to more formal discussions taking place between Nexus MAT and other MATs in the next 12 months, though this isn't certain.

Whatever the next 12 months brings, the Trust has worked through the global pandemic having continued to evolve and improve, when so many others have been, understandably, nothing more than reactive to the challenges COVID-19 has presented. It is testament to the courage, professionalism and conviction of our school leaders that our academies have maintained unwavering commitment to the values of the Trust, which came from the values of our workforce.

One thing can be forecast for certain: in 12 months time, we will not be the same Trust, as we'll have achieved so much more growth, again: **together**.



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